



Affirmation:

United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

JUNE 1983

Post Office Box 1021

Evanston, Illinois 60204

GENERAL CONF. WORK UNDERWAY

In what was viewed by most attendees as a very productive meeting, the National Church Working Group met earlier this month in Philadelphia and began spelling out details for Affirmation's "presence" at the 1984 General Conference. That presence will consist of three sets of activities: an on-site educational witness of Affirmation to Conference delegates and media; issues education and legislative advocacy; and group building/community development within Affirmation.

Initial plans for the on-site witness call for publication of a daily newsletter, distribution of buttons and other symbols to be worn by delegates and supporters, development of a briefing kit for use with media, opening of a resource room stocked with educational materials, and offering a hospitality suite for informal dialogue and relaxation. Many of these tactics were successfully used at the previous 1980 General Conference.

The issues education/legislative advocacy work will be carried out principally by means of an "issues platform" currently being developed. This platform will comment on specific legislative proposals which have already been made and offer new proposed language where already-existing proposals are considered inadequate. Topics to be touched on in the platform are Social Principles Para 71F., Discipline Para. 906.13, ordination and dismissal procedures, lesbian/gay health concerns, strategies for conflict resolution on the lesbian/gay issue, proposals for sexual responsibility, and overall inclusiveness in the UMC. It is expected that the platform and its subsequent recommendations will be made public following consideration at the fall 1983 Affirmation meeting. This will be followed

(con'd on p.5)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Fall Meeting Coming Up
The Challenge of AIDS
MFSA Announces Covenant

CONFERENCES TAKE DIFFERING ACTIONS

A review of reports on 1983 Annual Conferences reveals that the UMC's stance toward homosexuality appears to be the single most discussed issue during the past year.

According to Newscope, a weekly UM newsletter, at least 59 of the 73 Annual Conferences in the U.S. took actions on the issue. 31 passed resolutions which called on the 1984 General Conference to specifically prohibit lesbians and gay men from entering the ordained ministry. In addition, 10 conferences supported language proposed by the UMC's Division of Ordained Ministry requiring, "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness," of all clergy. Several conferences reaffirmed support of the present UM position as stated in Social Principles Para. 71F.

The actions of at least two conferences suggest an even more repressive approach. Southern Illinois proposed legislation prohibiting lesbians and gay men from holding several lay offices in the church. In the SW Texas Conference (where the election of an openly gay man, Troy Stokes, to the conference's Board of Church & Society caused a major furor last year) a standing rule was adopted prohibiting membership of lesbians and gay men on conference and district boards and committees. This is believed to be the first action within the UMC to explicitly bar participation based on sexual orientation (Interestingly, the same conference polled its members about suggested methods of ministry to lesbian and gay people, their families and friends.)

On the positive side, five conferences voted resolutions which in one way or another eliminate the negative language about homosexuality in Social Principles Para. 71F. Oregon-Idaho and Nebraska conferences adopted language mandating that the UMC, "be in ministry for and with all persons...without assuming an accepting or condemning attitude." These actions echo that considered earlier this year by the UMC's Board of Church &

(con'd on p.5)

2. FALL MEETING FEATURES WORKSHOPS & PLANNING

Leadership development and planning for the next 6-12 months of Affirmation's ministry will be the foci of activities at the next semi-annual Affirmation meeting, set for September 16-18 in Baltimore. These two activities are being undertaken in response to requests from members for assistance in development of skills which can be used in local level work, as well as needs related to the upcoming General Conference and other events in 1984. Leadership for both activities will be provided by various members of Affirmation.

Additionally, the September meeting will feature a special ecumenical community celebration, led by members of the various lesbian/gay faith groups in Baltimore. That will take place on Friday evening.

Featured topics of the leadership development workshops are: Gay/Lesbian Theology, Lesbian Spirituality, Building Local Support Groups, Race and Class Issues as They Relate to Lesbian/Gay Concerns, Links Between Homophobia and Other Social Issues, and Learning to Use Scriptural Backgrounds Effectively. All of these workshops will be held during Saturday morning.

Most of the planning work of the meeting will occur during Saturday afternoon and

Sunday morning. Topics for that work will be Affirmation's presence at the 1984 General Conference (see story, p. 1) and program goals and decision-making style beyond 1984.

The weekend meeting will be held at St. John's UMC, 27th & St. Paul Street, Baltimore. Registration is \$20 (please use form on p.5). Housing and breakfast will be provided in homes of local Affirmation members and friends. A lunch meal will be provided on Saturday and Sunday.

In addition to registration, it is expected that all attendees who are able will participate in the meeting's travel pool. The travel pool is an attempt to spread out and share travel costs among all participants, so that no undue financial burden is placed upon any one member. In theory, the travel pool divides up and shares all expenses among attendees. It was tried at the spring meeting in Los Angeles; at that event each person was asked to contribute approximately \$100. Persons who wish to come to the Baltimore meeting, but would trouble participating in the travel pool should contact John Hannay (see box on p.6) so that special arrangements can be made.

LOCAL AFFIRMATION FOLK ARE ACTIVE!

Affirmation folk in the CAL-NEVADA Conference were successful at getting a number of positive statements adopted at their recent Conference session in June. Included in the actions were a plan to combat homophobia within the Conference as well as a call for the General Conference to do the same. Those interested in getting involved there should contact Mary Gaddis (see box on p.6).

Affirmation CHICAGO meets periodically for support purposes, but functions most of the time informally. "We're sort of like a family," says long-time member Mike Troyer. They did have a visible presence at the recent Northern Illinois Conference Session. In coalition with the Methodist Federation for Social Action, they succeeded in passing a petition to delete derogatory language from Social Principles Para. 71F. For more information on their work contact Mike Troyer at [REDACTED].

Folks in LOS ANGELES will have a busy year beginning this fall. A principal focus of their work will be a series of district workshops on homophobia. To get involved there contact Lyle Loder (see box, p.6).

MID-ATLANTIC Affirmation folk will be holding a series of evening events this fall focusing on feminism as it relates to lesbian/gay concerns. They will also be working to educate the Baltimore and Virginia Conferences' delegations to the 1984 General Conference about lesbian/gay concerns. To find out more about their work write: [REDACTED] Washington, D.C. [REDACTED].

Affirmation folk in the NEW YORK CITY area are contemplating periodic gatherings beginning this fall. So are folks in EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA. For information about New York contact Paul Abels at [REDACTED]; for Eastern Pa. contact D.J. Porter at [REDACTED] New Hope, PA [REDACTED] or phone [REDACTED] before 10 pm.

Finally, there are Affirmation folk active in NASHVILLE (of all places!). Among other things they help to get out this newsletter (yeah---!). You can find out more about them by writing them c/o Edgehill UMC, 1502 Edgehill Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212.

Is there Affirmation work going on in your area that we don't know about? If so, contact us at [REDACTED], Evanston, IL [REDACTED]. We'd love to hear from you!

The Challenge of AIDS

The subject of much press coverage lately, AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is rapidly becoming a national health crisis. It is a disease where there are very few answers - only questions. Although it has shown up in all sectors of the population, it has been particularly virulent within the gay male community. 70% of AIDS victims are gay men (generally aged 25-40), one-third of whom die within two years.

AIDS presents an acute crisis for those of us in the lesbian/gay community or with lesbian/gay friends or relatives. It is also an opportunity to become involved in caring for each other in ways that we have not previously known. To foster this caring, we offer in this newsletter an interview with Charles Bergner, Affirmation member from New York and member of Washington Square UMC. Charles is an AIDS patient and currently undergoing treatment for Karposi's Sarcoma. This interview is reprinted from Mid-Atlantic Affirmation News, with permission.

MAA NEWS: Our first question is: How is your health?

CHARLES: In April, I was diagnosed with Karposi's Sarcoma, a rare cancer commonly linked with AIDS. Because of the lack of information, research and experience with AIDS, it's extremely difficult to place me more exactly at this time. That is a game my doctors are not going to play. Right now I only have the Sarcoma (laughs) - like my doctor says, "You're healthy, you only have one problem!" It just happens to be a life-threatening cancer that could kill me in a year! But he's right, if that's all I have, then it's pretty good. Yet, we are constantly on the vigil for any sign of another opportunist infection or the terrible pneumonia.

The chemotherapy seems to be having a dramatic positive effect - the trouble is living with the side effects, which can be just as devastating to your health and sense of well being. We just take one day at a time. Every day seems to be a different story. I do not think that it's getting worse. We're all very pleased with that.

MAA NEWS: Let's go into your faith background. How did you come to be involved in the United Methodist Church?

CHARLES: Well, I was baptized as a Methodist, into a large Texas farm family. My mother and father were active in the church, in the official boards, trustees, women's society and all that. We were part of a very small church in a little bitty town in West Texas. I became a member at the usual time, 12 or 13 I think. I remember taking that very seriously.

About that time, a new minister moved to town, Rev. Jones. He was a mature person who brought a whole new worldview to us. His person and ministry educated our whole group. I continued to know him for years after he moved away and be supported by his ministry. Yet when I went away to college, I pretty much dropped out of church. It was during the Vietnam war and I'm sorry, but the church was not dealing with that well. So I kinda' fell away and devoted myself to other things. It was then that I became involved in gay politics, too.

It wasn't until I had lived in New York for two years that I accidentally saw an article in the New York Times that was telling about a conference at Washington Square Church on human sexuality. It included an interview with Paul Abels and Paul discussed how he was an openly gay minister and the political problems in the church. Well, I was shocked! The church I had known had a gay minister! And only two blocks from my house! Well, I decided to check it out and as soon as I got there it was very much the Methodist home I had known and needed. It made me aware of something I had been missing. And there was the opportunity to be honest about myself. I fell into liking that and became active in the ministries there.

MAA NEWS: Do you remember first hearing about AIDS? Can you compare that personal reaction to when you were diagnosed with AIDS?

CHARLES: I think that the first news I ever read was in the New York Native. I remember being shocked at how awful it was. It wasn't until February of this year that I found out that a friend of mine in Houston had AIDS. About that time I began to have problems of my own. I had some fears about it and hadn't really contacted Bobby. I had held off. When I did write, it was not only a letter to comfort him, but to tell him also that I was an AIDS patient too. It was pretty heavy.

When the doctor told me I had Karposi's, I just couldn't believe it! I'm healthy, ya' know a lovely person physically! So, it took some soaking in.

My first reaction was a serious loss of identity. I didn't want to loose my identity as Charles Bergner - to be something else. Being an "AIDS Victim" sounded like a pretty bad swap to me. I'd much rather be Charles. I still have to deal with this every day. Even in an interview like this, I have to trust that my own assertiveness and my natural humanity comes through.

MAA NEWS: With AIDS, as with any cancer, there is a lot of fear attached to it. How do you maintain hope and does your faith play a part in that?

CHARLES: When I'm strong enough, I can do a real good job on my own. Like now, I feel pretty good. I feel good about hope and faith and allowing for both to play a part in healing. Yet there are times when I'm so sick, so anemic, that all I can do is lay. It's like being a beached whale - I can't do anything! At those times it's hard to know anything for sure, much less think about hope, faith, and all that. What I depend on then is my whole cultural environment. I have my lover, David, who is practically by my side all the time, my sister, Scout, my great friend Scott, and other people - very close friends who keep checking on me. These people are a reflection of who I am and what I am. They are sustaining the same kind of choices I would be making if I was healthy. When we get into situations where I'm not fit to make decisions, I let them do it - I give myself over to them in a way. And I receive their gifts.

It's a two-way thing, you know. Sometimes I love to make claims of faith and spirituality - a positive attitude that keeps me going. The spirituality I get through the Christian tradition is leading me into a positive energy level. But there are times when I don't have the energy. My faith and commitment is then in those people around me. It's real and positive between us - and its sustaining. I keep giving back to them what I can. It's a nurturing process that turns into a healing process for all of us.

MAA NEWS: What comments do you have for gay and lesbian people - how should they react to friends and relatives who have AIDS?

CHARLES: First of all, you have to deal honestly with yourself and how you feel about being around someone who has

AIDS. How should you react? It's not helpful to an AIDS patient to have someone who's scared of them. You should stay away from them. Call them on the phone or write them - but stay away from them. Do not impose your fear on them.

After that - just have faith in your natural ability to find a gift to give to that person. I have been so surprised at the multitude of ways that people have been helpful to me - people saying, "I love you, I hope you get better." There is nothing too tacky, too sentimental with too many flowers on it. It all works and contributes a great deal.

In terms of actual illness, there are things that need to be done like taking someone for a drive or to the doctor. It's a matter of staying in touch and being aware of what's going on. People need to be involved to whatever extent they can be. In particular, the ones who keep calling back are the ones who are really there. They make the difference.

MAA NEWS: For ministers out in church, that may come in contact with only one person with AIDS and may not know how to deal with it, what in addition would you add that the Church could do to support an AIDS patient?

CHARLES: Well, they can do as much as they can in a pastoral way. It's also appropriate for certain resolutions to be sent and to go in support for funding for AIDS patients, that sort of political/social maneuvering.

A really dynamic way for the church to help out, however, is for the church, as a whole, to make a very clear statement for a segment of our society that is having to deal with a terrible disease and a lot of pain. It needs to look at this disease in the context of our entire society, also. We are not just a tiny segment or a few people.

It would also be great if the church would use this time to correct a lot of misinformation about gays. This could be a real opportunity, as horrible as it is to bring a humaneness to the stereotypes that gays are people who have problems and don't have joys in life to celebrate. I just wish that people would have compassion instead of a judgement. The whole church could benefit from such an exploration. It could be a real healing time for all of us. After all, gay and lesbian people have the same healing and acceptance needs as any other person.

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| <p>PERSONS WISHING TO CORRESPOND WITH CHARLES may write him at: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] New York, NY [REDACTED].</p> |
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General Conf. Plans (con'd.)

up by committee monitoring and coalition building prior to and during the Conference.

Finally, in what most participants considered "a most important" aspect of Affirmation's presence during the Conference, there are a host of activities designed to foster Affirmation community development and "spirit." These include a "Dinner in Celebration of Faithfulness" (with special guest speakers/performers), a mid-day worship service half-way through the conference, a coffee house open during select evenings, a community concert held in conjunction with the Baltimore lesbian/gay community, and various events of "street theatre" during Conference recesses. Additionally, there are as yet undeveloped plans for Affirmation worship time and development of affinity/support groups to keep Affirmation members nurtured during some of the more stressful times of the Conference.

All of the plans drawn up by the National Church Working Group will be reviewed at the upcoming Affirmation meeting in Baltimore (see story, p.2). Affirmation members who are planning on being at the General Conference, but cannot be at the fall meeting, should contact John Hannay (see box, p.6) so that you can receive advance mailings, etc.

Many "helping hands" are needed to make these plans for our presence significant. "Gifts and graces" offered by anyone are most certainly welcome. Won't you help?

Annual Conf. Actions (con'd)

Society (BCS). BCS will put its language into final form this October.

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) is considering a recommendation from its Women's Division to call for the deletion of Discipline Para. 906.13. That paragraph prohibits funding of "gay caucuses or groups" and has been used to limit many forms of education and ministry. BCS is considering a similar proposal.

In a related matter, the Pacific-Southwest Conference adjourned without acting on any of the resolutions relating to homosexuality which were before it. However, its clergy members, acting in executive session, voted by a narrow margin to accept the recommendation of the Conference's Board of Ordained Ministry to continue on involuntary leave of absence Affirmation Co-spokesperson Morris Floyd. This was done because Floyd refused to "clarify" that "behavior judged by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible to Christian teaching" was not taking place and "was not intended to take place."

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE: A comparison of where we are, six months before the 1984 General Conference with where we were at the same time before the 1980 General Conf.

The next meeting of the Working Group will be Thursday evening, Sept. 15 and the morning and afternoon of Friday, Sept. 16, immediately prior to the fall meeting. That meeting will also be held in Baltimore.

FALL MEETING REGISTRATION AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Name _____ Evening phone _____

Address _____ Estimated Travel Cost _____
(for travel pool): _____
I will need special consideration in regard to the travel pool. _____

I will arrive in Baltimore on (date) _____ at (time) _____ by (means) _____.

Will you need transportation to the meeting site? _____. If yes, give information as to when, where, flight number, etc.:

Will you need housing provided for you? _____

PLEASE MAIL BY SEPTEMBER 10 to: Mark Bowman, _____ Washington, D.C. _____,
WITH THE \$20 REGISTRATION FEE. After September 10, call Mark at _____.

_____ I cannot come to the Baltimore meeting, but wish to be kept informed and involved.

_____ Enclosed is a contribution toward my membership renewal/newsletter subscription.

_____ Enclosed is a additional contribution toward Affirmation's ministry: _____ (amount).

MFSA ANNOUNCES COVENANT

The Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) has begun circulating a "Covenant of Compassion and Solidarity" in support of lesbians and gay men. The covenant, designed to be subscribed to by United Methodist individuals and congregations, describes itself as "a manifestation of our pledge to do all in our power to insure total inclusiveness of lesbians and gay men in the UMC."

MFSA, which last year celebrated its 75th year in the denomination, has taken this action in fulfillment of one of its four action priorities for 1983-84. The covenant, printed in brochure form, urges signers to commit themselves to one or more of these:

- "Wear the pink triangle as a sign of solidarity;
- "Oppose any actions at Annual Conferences or the General Conference which conflict with this covenant;
- "Urge our delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conference to subscribe to this covenant;
- "Stand by our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in the church in the spirit that their cause is our cause, their pain our pain, and their condemnation our condemnation; we will engage in such actions as may be necessary to protect their rights and ensure their acceptance;
- "Work openly and actively in our local churches for the acceptance of gay and lesbian persons in full membership."

In addition to this covenant being put forth at the national level, MFSA chapters in several annual conferences have been strong witnesses and supporters of Affirmation efforts. Persons interested in receiving the covenant brochure and/or getting involved in MFSA's work should write: MFSA, 76 Clinton Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10301.

AFFIRMATION COORDINATING CMTE. MEMBERS:

Mary Gaddis, [redacted] Holy City, CA [redacted]
 Morris Floyd, [redacted]
 Minneapolis, MN [redacted]
 Ava Scott, [redacted] Philadelphia, PA [redacted]
 Michael Collins, [redacted]
 New York, NY [redacted]
 Leanne Tigert, [redacted] Waltham, MA [redacted]
 John Hannay, [redacted]
 Washington, D.C. [redacted]
 Lesbian Member whose name cannot be used.
 Lyle Loder, [redacted] Los Angeles, CA [redacted]

IT'S TIME TO RENEW!

It's that time of year again!

Last August, we asked all of you for contributions to renew memberships in Affirmation (which included receiving this newsletter). Now we need you to renew again. The basic rate is \$15 per person. For those who wish to join, but want to receive the newsletter in a plain, unmarked envelope, the rate is \$20.

Additionally, Affirmation is in particular need of contributions above and beyond membership donations. There are many expenses we have which cannot be covered by memberships alone.

You can help! A number of Affirmation members have been making pledges ranging from \$5-\$50 per month. Will you join them?

Send your tax-deductible contribution today to: Affirmation, [redacted], Evanston, IL [redacted]. You can even use the registration form on p.5. Please make your check payable to "National Affirmation." Thank you!

ARE YOU MOVING SOON? Don't forget to send a change-of-address card to us! We want to stay in touch with you! Send your notice to: Affirmation, [redacted], Evanston, IL [redacted]. Thank you!

P.O. Box 23636
 L'Enfant Plaza Station
 Washington, D.C. 20024

Non-Profit Org.
 Permit #2904
 Washington, DC

*marriage
 decision fortunate*